BRIEF TO THE

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF LABOUR'S FORUM

ON

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Submitted by:

Social Planning and Research Council
of Hamilton & District

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THE SOCIAL PLANNING and RESEARCH COUNCIL of Hamilton and District

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The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton & District is pleased to present this brief to the Ontario Federation of Labour's Forum on Affirmative Action. The brief is primarily descriptive in content. Specifically, through the use of recently released 1981 Census information, the brief presents a comparative profile on the economic and employment status of women in Hamilton between the years 1971 to 1981. In this respect, the brief does not intend to make a strong contribution to the social policy debate which must, necessarily, occupy major energy in the forum. Rather it seeks to provide a descriptive framework upon which the panel and others can draw in ensuing discussion.

WOMEN'S LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

In the decade spanning 1971-1981, Hamilton witnessed an enormous expansion in both the number of women working outside the home and the rate of their participation. Over this ten year period, the number of women who were employed or seeking employment increased by more than 15,000. Their participation rate grew by 8.9 percentage points (see Table 1).

As women's participation in the local labour market increased, male participation actually declined and only 2,265 more men were active in the labour force in 1981 than in 1971.

TABLE 1

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION, MEN AND WOMEN, IN HAMILTON (1971 and 1981)

Individuals in the Labour Force	1971 Number	1971 Participation Rate	1981 Number	1981 Participation Rate
Men	88,125	79.7	90,390	77.5
Women	48,965	41.8	64,005	50.7

It is useful to quickly look at some of the characteristics of women active in the labour force in Hamilton. Many are, in fact, married women. In 1980, the participation rate for married women in Hamilton was 50% (or, to put it another way, 50% of married women in our community were active in the labour force).

In many cases, women who work outside the home are sole support parents. From 1981 Census data, we can safely conclude that at least 68% of female single parents were active in the labour force.

It has already been well documented elsewhere that the majority of women work because they have to, either because they are the sole breadwinners or because of economic needs of the family. There is no reason to believe that the situation is any different in Hamilton than elsewhere. Having noted this, it is useful to see what women's labour force participation looks like, and to highlight what, if any, significant changes there have been since 1971.

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT

The occupational classifications used in the 1971 and 1981 Censuses are not directly comparable. From the 1971 Census, we do know that approximately 58% of the female labour force worked in clerical, sales and service occupations. Twenty-two percent of managerial or administrative occupations were occupied by women. This pattern aptly demonstrated the theoretical notion of female job "ghettos" characterized by low wages and little opportunity for advancement.

When looking at the 1981 Census material for Hamilton, we discover that 61.8% of the female labour force was employed in clerical, sales and service occupations, although 29% of managerial or administrative jobs were occupied by women. The shifts in Statistics Canada occupational definitions make it difficult to attribute a strong trend in either direction. It is sufficient for the moment to state that there is no evidence of strong movement towards broader representation in Hamilton as far as women's occupations are concerned; women still tend to be employed, by and large, in the low wage sectors of our local economy.

This fact is brought home to us in dramatic style when we review the differences in men's and women's income from employment, and shifts from 1971 to 1981 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2

AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT INCOME FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN HAMILTON (1971 and 1981)

Average Employment Income	1971	1981
Men	$ 6,957	$ 16,803
Women	$ 3,266	$ 8,246
Women's Average Employment Income as a % of Men's	46.9%	49.1%

In the decade since 1970, women's income from employment as a percentage of men's has improved by only 2.2 percentage points, despite major increases in their rate of participation. Women in Hamilton, on average, still make less than 50% of what men do. This contrasts with 46.8% on a national basis and 50.9% on a provincial basis. Clearly, any trend towards equal pay between men and women (whether for work of equal value or similar work) is proving marginal at best, at the local, provincial or national levels.

SOME IMPLICATIONS

If affirmative action is understood as a mechanism for ensuring the systematic removal of barriers to employment for particular groups, the implications of the above data are of importance. The results of effective affirmative action programmes would, on a global basis, mean a significant improvement in the representation of target groups at all levels within a local economy. There is no strong evidence to suggest that this is happening.

A further outcome of effective affirmative action would be significantly narrowing differentials in income from employment between men and women. While there has been some shift in Hamilton, this narrowed gap suggests a "catching up" with provincial averages which have, themselves, deteriorated over the past decade.

Census data suggest, therefore, little in the way of substantial changes for women in Hamilton over the past decade. Whether this is due to ineffective affirmative action programmes, or to the failure of employers to undertake such programmes, is an issue better addressed by other Forum participants.

From a social policy perspective, however, several key contentions emerge.

Women clearly represent an appropriate target group for major initiatives in the area of affirmative action programmes for employers. Where the goal is increased participation of women at all employment levels, active employer co-operation is required. Given the marginal success of affirmative action to date, the S.P.R.C. would call on governments to review existing approaches to affirmative action with a view to enhancing their effectiveness. This review should include an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of approaches ranging from increased attempts to encourage voluntary compliance through to legislated supports, such as contract compliance.

Further, and particularly in a time of economic crisis, governments have a responsibility to ensure that the appropriate ancilliary and support services which enhance women's employability are neither reduced to ineffectiveness, nor, for that matter eliminated. Women should be maintained as a target group for new skills training and job creation programmes and funding of such programmes at least maintained at current levels.

Finally, the S.P.R.C. recognizes the important role which organized labour has, and continues, to play in pressing for the development of effective affirmative action programmes. We welcome the leadership provided by the Ontario Federation of Labour around this issue, and offer our co-operation in helping women in our community to more effectively organize for productive change.

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